

1996 AFI Maya Deren Awards

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After graduating from Berkeley with a degree in anthropology, Strand threw herself into the cultural ferment of the Bay Area in the 1960s. Along with Bruce Baillie, she founded Canyon Cinema in 1961, nurturing it for four years as it grew into the premiere screening and distribution organization on the west coast. Moving to Los Angeles, she studied ethnographic films at UCLA, graduating with an MFA in 1971. Since then she sustained herself by teaching, primarily at Occidental College where, during a 25-year-long tenure, she directed a program in film as art.

During the course of these activities on behalf of the independent cinema, Strand made her own films. Her first were documentaries about Meso-American cultures that brought to ethnography the expressive languages of the experimental film. As today anthropology increasingly recognizes the subjective interplay between self and other, it finds itself in a land that Strand mapped 20 years ago. A similar vanguardness informed the next phase of her work as she brought her vision to bear on people in America, especially women.

By the late '70s Strand had full mastery of what had become her signature style: photographing her subjects in motion, frequently back-lit, using a hand-held telephoto lens in extreme close-up so as to all but eliminate depth of field, she magnified the somatic responsiveness that Maya Deren had claimed as the great potential of the body-as-apparatus. The result was an extraordinary sensuous lyricism, constantly dissolving

into abstraction, that became for her the vehicle for intuition and sensuality in both iconography and the medium itself. The core of her life's work has been a series of intimate portraits of women envisioned in this mode, but since its unabashed lyricism and eroticism ran counter to feminist theory of the time she began it, its full power has only gradually been recognized.

These films were accompanied by yet another series, one of compilation films that surrealistically fragmented and recombined found footage, often foregrounding women's issues otherwise latent in them. With the increased currency of quotation and the non-organic representation of already-existing images in post-modernism, compilation films have acquired a fresh eminence. Again Strand's work has been seminal, her achievement spanning and summarizing the possibilities of an avant-garde.

—David E. James



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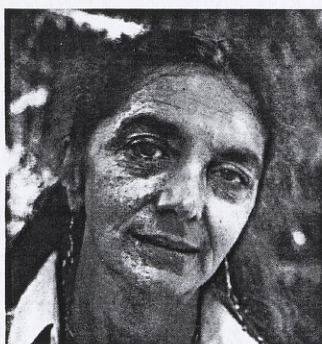
1996 MAYA DEREN AWARDS

For Independent Film and Video Artists

Kenneth Anger



Chick Strand



Leslie Thornton



January 31, 1996
Anthology Film Archives
New York City

1996 AFI Maya Deren Awards

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—David E. James



Loose Ends. Photo courtesy Chick Strand

Filmography

- | | | | | | |
|------|--|------|--|------|---|
| 1986 | Fake Fruit
22 min., color, 16mm | 1979 | Soft Fiction
54 min., B/W, 16mm | 1976 | Mujer de mil fuegos
(Woman of a Thousand Fires)
15 min., color, 16mm |
| 1986 | Coming Up for Air
26.5 min., color, 16mm | 1979 | Loose Ends
25 min., B/W, 16mm | 1976 | Guacamole
10 min., color, 16mm |
| 1986 | By the Lake
9.5 min., color, 16mm | 1979 | Kristallnacht
7 min., B/W, 16mm | 1976 | Elasticity
25 min., color, 16mm |
| 1986 | Artificial Paradise
12.5 min., color, 16mm | 1979 | Fever Dream
7 min., B/W, 16mm | 1976 | Cosas de mi vida
25 min., color, 16mm |
| 1986 | Anselmo and the Women
35 min., color, 16mm | 1979 | Cartoon le mousse
15 min., B/W, 16mm | 1970 | Mosori Monika
20 min., color, 16mm |
| | | | | 1967 | Waterfall
3 min., color, 16mm |
| | | | | 1967 | Anselmo
4 min., color, 16mm |
| | | | | 1966 | Angel Blue Sweet Wings
3 min., color, 16mm |

ANSELMO AND THE WOMEN: 35 minutes, color, sound, 1986.
Expressive documentary about a Mexican street musician,
his wife and his woman in the "casa segunda," (the second
house). It is about three lives in conflict from three
points of view, told by the people involved.

BY THE LAKE: 9 1/2 minutes, color, sound, 1986.
An experiment with left-over images and found sound taken
out of context and reconstructed into new relationships
and meanings.

INTERMISSION

FAKE FRUIT: 22 minutes, color, sound, 1986.
Expressive documentary about young women who make fruit
and vegetables in a papier mache factory in Mexico.

COMING UP FOR AIR: 26 1/2 minutes, color, sound, 1986.
An experiment with the idea of story telling using
literature from disparate sources and images which form
a counterpoint to the "story."

ARTIFICIAL PARADISE: 12 1/2 minutes, color, sound, 1986.
An experiment in romanticism.

BY THE LAKE: 9 1/2 minutes, color, sound, 1986.

This is sort of a collage film, using images shot for other films that somehow never were finished. The sound comes from various sound gathering adventures. Some were recorded at Lake Tahoe, more during an operation on a horse, and some is taken from a tape of an old radio program, "I Love a Mystery."

FAKE FRUIT: 22 minutes, color, sound, 1986.

In the town where I spend my time in Mexico, I had an American friend, a man who was a painter. He has married a Mexican woman and had three children with her. They lived in her family's four hundred year old house. Although they had enough money because she had a beauty shop, he was not a Mexican and he could not work . . . which actually didn't bother him too much. So he would paint and make trips to the U.S. so he could work and make a little money to take back down to Mexico with him. For years he tried to think of schemes which would make him money so he wouldn't have to be a yo-yo. He got into a business with a man making fake suits of armor . . . but the other guy left town. Then he started doing illegal rubbings of Toltec bas-reliefs, but couldn't sell them. Then he started making papier mache fruit and vegetables to sell to local tourist stores. They became very popular, and before he could think twice, the whole operation grew to the extent that he had to rent a factory, and hire people to make the unpainted pieces, in their homes. Because an American can't own a business in Mexico, everything had to be in his wife's name. Well, after about three years he started getting rich. He'd have shoe boxes full of money. I saw one that had thirty thousand bucks in it. What does an artist know about money? This guy, not ever having made more money than he needed to eat on, really didn't know what to do. Actually he had made a paradise for himself . . . really nice beautiful women to work with everyday, lots of deals to make, business to do, people to see, supplies to buy, things to sell . . . but he got bored with the whole thing. This is a film about the women who worked for him.

ARTIFICIAL PARADISE: 12 1/2 minutes, color, sound, 1986.

This is about those wonderful experiences that we sometimes have when we love a person secretly and the delightful cozy warm feelings we have about the romance of it all. These are never experiences of intrigue or unfaithfulness to our current relationships. . . they are mysterious and magical and we end up being quite relieved that we can love without the need or desire to act upon it. These experiences become mythical, since the beloved is quite simply beautiful in all ways because we never give circumstances a chance to change it into something less tender. I met Berna one day when I was looking at a ranch near my Mexican town so I could rent it for a couple of my male students who were taking summer courses with me screenwriting. They imagined themselves to be tough-guy writers like Hemingway or somebody and the isolated ranch seemed to be just the right gift I could give them to help fill their wildest dreams. Well, I had already done the business part, when the owner, an American, said, look you make films . . . why not use this ranch for a location, and my horse groom, who is just the nicest young man . . . Yeah, yeah I said . . . and met the horse groom. His was a really beautiful Indian guy about 18 years old. It didn't click until I sat down with the landlord on the steps and watched this kid work . . . what movement! What art! Well, why not, I thought and went over and asked Berna if he'd do it. He said, sure. The kid was an orphan . . . on the streets begging at seven, couldn't read or write. Very politely, he took my hand in both of his, and said, whenever you want . . . it will be a big adventure to make a film. And so we began. After a while, I realized that this kid had absolutely no guile and was completely honest . . . he had a sweetness about him . . . a true innocence. When my lady friend came for a visit from Georgia, the three of us would go out and have adventures. Berna had never known about the places we took him. He fell in love with my friend, and I loved watching it because I knew that he, like I, had this wonderful secret and I wanted very much for him to have it. Of course, my friend knew it without him saying so. You can tell how he feels when looks at her in the film, because she is in it, too. So, we took him to listen to live jazz and we all got drunk and giggled . . . and we took him to the disco and danced all night . . . It was he who made the costumes and make up for the dance scene in the film . . . Actually he was the one with the ideas about how the film should look, not me. Anyway, we had grand adventures and tender hearts. We have been friends ever since. He is married now, and has three children. I think maybe I was some sort of influence. They decided they wanted no more children after three, and did something about it. He encourages his to be free, and he take care of the children when she goes to town (she lifts weights), and helps in the house. We still have many adventures, some of which will appear in films that I've shot and have yet to edit.

Now, when we part at the end of the summers, I take his hand in both of mine, and we hug and kiss goodbye. We love each other in a very special way I think. HE still, after all of these years secretly loves my friend . . . but now like my feeling for him, and his for me, the feelings have become so deep inside that we are family . . . and this is a film to celebrate that.

COMING UP FOR AIR: 26 1/2 minutes, color, sound, 1986.

One year I had a show in New York and a friend in Vermont who suggested that I visit her as long as I was coming East. I had wanted to make a film with her for years because she had been part of my Mexican life before her move to Vermont. So, I brought along my camera with no idea of what I wanted to do except that I had seen a film called "THE SON OF AMIR IS DEAD," a French/Algerian feature which I like a lot. I really couldn't figure out much about avant garde film, or even if I wanted to go on pretending that that's what I did, so I was thinking about some sort of narrative thing back there in 1976 when I started shooting it. Well, the show was in Rochester and I was beginning to think that I was having some flashbacks from the days in the 60's when you could order pure LSD from the Light Company in England, because there was something wrong with the trees. By the time I got to Vermont in my rented car, I felt that maybe I was really on a trip to Disneyland, because the trees all looked fake . . . the fall color was absolutely staggering. Well, I could hardly think very much about this narrative thing . . . the only thing I wanted to do was to get all of that color onto film. So I got my friend out there in it, walking around mostly, and she had a nice woman friend and they had horses, and we got them out into a field on the horses and they rode around a lot. Then I returned in another winter and shot some more. I couldn't believe the Vermont winter either. And I shot some stuff that I thought went with the story of "THE SON OF AMIR IS DEAD" as I had transformed it into something different. "THE SON OF AMIR IS DEAD" is about this guy from France who committed robberies with another guy from Algeria who had come north to work. The two guys don't hang out together and don't know much about each other except when they meet at an old abandoned bus in the woods outside Paris to plan the robberies. One day the French guy comes to the bus and finds the Algerian guy there dead. He feels bad because he really doesn't know who this guy was, or how he felt, or how he saw the world. So, he decides that he has some sort of responsibility to the dead guy, in his memory so to speak, to fashion in his mind some sort of image as to who this Algerian was. He decides that he'd go to Algeria and get in touch with his family and friends who maybe would tell him something. Once in Algeria, he has to wait around a lot. I remember one scene where he waits in a tiny cafe until somebody or another will come to tell him something . . . there is a radio in there, and a long scene of him drinking tea and waiting. Nothing else is going on. Finally he is told that no one is coming. He figures there is even more of a mystery . . . no one wants to tell him about the Algerian. That's all I remember of the film . . . It's even a mystery to me. But I like that . . . and thought that these fragments could make an idea for a film. Meanwhile, for years I'd been collecting bits and pieces of prose and poetry that I like . . . a sentence or two from a novel, maybe, and stuff that

I'd written . So, I patched it all together and made some kind of a narrative. I wanted it to sound like some lady was reading it over the radio, because I had once heard "The Yellow Wallpaper" being read by a woman with an English accent. For a long time, I've been interested in having a prose track, which might or might not relate to the visuals, so I played with that idea, too. I haven't the least idea what this film is about except perhaps it has to do with loss of identity, horror, and dreams, or maybe it has to do with some sort of giant memory bank, and we are all clients. We deposit and withdraw, maybe at random, but with some sort of feeling of deja vu. I'm sure that by the time you see this film, my ideas about what it is will have changed, or maybe I won't have thought about it at all.

ANSELMO AND THE WOMEN: 35 minutes, color, sound, 1986.

I met Anselmo and his family twenty years ago, and since then I have made three films about them. Anselmo is a street musician and he has a little band. When I met him, he was very poor. He lived in a house with no electricity and dirt floors, with his wife and eight children. They cooked outside on an open fire and used a hole in the ground for a toilet. He shared his two room house with another family. I admired him for his tenacity and strength of spirit. Whatever money he could earn with his band, he used to send all of his children to school and to pay for music lessons for his sons, "so that they would have a better life than I did." As the years passed, two more children were born, and his oldest sons were sent to play in the symphony orchestra in Guanajuato. More cash filtered into the family pocket. They built more rooms, including a bathroom, a fine new kitchen and in one of the original rooms Anselmo made a school supply store for the daughters so that "they would have a choice of whether to get married or not and they could be more independent." None of the girls ever got married. All of the children have finished high school and all have gone to vocational school; the girls in business or social work, and one of the boys is a lawyer, another a journalist. But the girls all still work in the store, and the boys still play music for a living. They have their own group, and it is quite famous in Mexico. They play at fancy hotels, and sometimes on TV . . . the Brothers Aguascalientes. All of this is because Anselmo had a vision for the future of his children and worked hard all of his life for it with many sacrifices. Anselmo is by nature an intelligent man. In his heart he always wanted more for himself. Through the years he had many lovers and with them, more children. His family knew and when the children grew up they sided with their mother and now leave him pretty much out in the cold. The sons make good money and give a lot of it to the family. Anselmo doesn't have as many music jobs now, so he can't contribute much, and because he feels responsible for the children he has with other women, gives some of his earnings to them. He doesn't have much say in the affairs of his legal family, but to the world they put on a united front. I was pleased when the year after I had shot the footage for this film, his musical sons came back to town as a featured part of the celebration of the birthday of the Saint for which the town is named. Everyone came out to hear them play . . . home boys make good . . . and both Anselmo and his wife Adela were introduced. The people are proud because these are the children of two poor Indians who couldn't read or write.

The film was shot ten years ago, when Anselmo's current lover was Cruz. She had been married before, but her husband ran away, leaving her with a little boy. Together, she and Anselmo had two more children. The film is about how Anselmo, his wife Adela

and his lover Cruz feel about the situation and about their lives.

A few months after the film was shot Anselmo's oldest daughter by his wife died of cancer of the uterus. She had told no one of her pain, she simply bore it until it killed her. In the film she is the one in the orange dress who is washing dishes with her mother Adela. I did not shoot the funeral. The girl was my family, too. But I'd like to tell you about it because the real adventure of filmmaking is the events, experiences, and the intense relationships that the filmmaker is involved in and which rarely become part of the film. They are the filmmaker's secrets.

Georgina was the oldest child. She was born on a dirt floor without a doctor to help. She had TB when very young, and had never developed entirely because of malnutrition. She was a bright girl, always working, moving quickly. I remember her with a shawl on her head, shy and friendly. I remember once at a concert where her brothers were playing in the days when they played their violins in the symphony. It was held in a church, and there was a famous pianist, a woman as soloist. One of the sons was first violinist and the other, concert-master. The whole family was very proud. They didn't often get to see the boys play. But the orchestra had been invited to play at the music festival in our town which is noted for its fine music festivals. The whole family went together along with my husband and I. Georgina sat next to me in the front row. No shawl this night . . . she had on a new dress and some kind of men's cologne which really smelled bad. She knew the music very well and her fingers kept the tempo on her knee covered with her new double knit dress, the little cheap ring on her finger flashing, reflecting the light from the chandeliers.

She loved to help me film, gathering all of the children together and herding them into my car to go out into the country to shoot. We'd maybe pass the stand where they sold fresh grape juice . . . jugo de uva . . . hoo-go de oo-va we'd sing . . . they were our favorite words. I miss her very much.

On the day she died, her aunt came to our house to tell us to come to the rosary to be held at their house that night. The open casket was in the front room. Anselmo sat on the patio, back in the shadows . . . he kept saying that he'd lost his secretary . . . because it was she that would organize his street and when they had a job. She could write and do numbers, and he couldn't. At midnight, Georgina's Godmother dressed the corpse in wedding attire, well not wedding exactly, but all in white, with a little crown, because Georgina had died a virgin. Then her brother shot off rockets from the roof to send her soul off to heaven. The people stayed all night. The next morning people arrived with flowers . . . tons of them. The hearse came and her brothers put the coffin in it. Then we all followed it to

the church. Her two oldest brothers played their violins . . . two beautiful and sad songs. The priest did the mass, and out of respect my husband and I did the necessary things. After mass we shook the hands of those around us. Her brothers loaded the coffin into the hearse and we walked behind it the mile to the cemetery. There were over a hundred people. The coffin was carried from the hearse to the grave . . . sort of a cement nitch in a wall where other people had been entombed, each in their own nitch. The priest did what priests do for the internment and then some of the male friends covered the opening over with cement, and the women placed the flowers around it. The oldest brother took a key out of his pocket and inscribed on the tomb, "Georgina Aguascalientes de Palma." This film is dedicated to that young woman.

Woman as Ethnographic Film Maker

Chick Strand

Chick Strand is an independent filmmaker in Los Angeles. She has produced many documentaries including "Angel Blue Sweet Wings," "Anselmo," "Waterfall and Mosori Monika," and others. In "Mosori Monika" she documented the Warao tribe in Venezuela, employing her uniquely subjective approach to the ethnographic film.

I have never really thought of myself as a "woman in film" . . . as opposite from "men in film" . . . I am a filmmaker (although there certainly seem to be many more men in film than women). I am not so stupid as not to see that there are differences in approach, perceptions, values, motivations and that these differences stem from the way our culture defines men and women and from the way that we are taught to see ourselves and as men see us. The questions and ways to find answers as to what is womanhood underneath all of the cultural definitions are far too complicated and interrelated to have any overt meaning during the act of creativity (at least for me). I do it . . . I make the film . . . and of course, all the things involved in our concepts of woman and reactions to being a woman come into play in what I do but I don't stop to analyze my motivations. Neither am I careful to present my films or the women in them in any special light, or with any social significance or in any special manner . . . except that it's all special in that it comes from me, a woman. I do it as I feel it. I am well aware that my own perceptions and the presentations of them contain many ambiguities which coincide with the difficulties of understanding what has gone on and is going on between men and women (I am talking about the new awareness) in our society. I am simply not an analytical person and have no real interest in sorting things out for the world at large through my films. But

there are women who are good at it and should make coherent statements, define the general problems and suggest solutions through their work.

There is a type of filmmaking in which I think women have an obligation to try and present women in a more straightforward manner and this is in the area of ethnographic film. Information gathering and methodology have already been established in anthropology and these methods can at least be partially fitted into ethnographic filmmaking. Most anthropologists are male and they consistently manage to make films about males, overemphasizing the male roles and leaving the women as *secondary* role players. Only rarely have women been the "stars" of ethnographic films. I think that this is not only because men don't think about making films about the women but also that men believe that women do have a secondary place (after all, what is more important, killing each other off or socializing the children?) and because males have a great problem in relating well to women of the culture. Too often field work about women is left to the anthropologist's wife (who is playing a secondary role to her husband's field work) or to female graduate students. Times are changing. Many gifted women anthropologists are working in the field, writing ethnographies, publishing them and concentrating on the women in the cultures but too few of them are making good films or allowing women filmmakers to come with them to make films.

The first people I make friends with in another culture are the women because I am a woman and because I have had similar experiences. Even working with very remote cultures,

women only have to look at each other and nod, or make a small gesture, while admiring a new born child or talking about work or men, to know, without words, about the experience. We feel sisterhood, a feeling of shared experience, shared knowledge and shared intuition (you cannot use that word in male-oriented anthropology) that males can never feel between themselves. No man can make a film about women in another culture if he wants to make a credible film, simply because the communication that he can never know is beyond methodology and beyond a "scientific" approach. What women anthropologists and filmmakers can do is to present the women of the new culture by using the established ways of information gathering and presentation plus a translation of this shared sisterhood.

I made a film about two women of different cultures in an acculturation situation. I knew that no matter how careful I was, there was no way for me to keep myself out of it. If I set up the camera and merely pushed the trigger until I ran out of film, it was still subjective. When, during twenty-four hours, or a week, or a year should one push the trigger? All is arbitrary, all is random, all is culturally defined. So one can be left with very little to go on. There is no way at all for ethnographic films to be objective. There merely are degrees of subjectivity. So I feel that it makes sense for women to offer their special communication in the form of the ethnographic film. There is no way that an ethnographic film can replace or substitute for the written ethnography. The film should be a complement to the written work. It is a means to get into other perspectives of the culture, to meet them, and to identify with them as fellow human beings.

from Chick Strand
10/93

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Two Films by Chick Strand

VICKI Z. PETERSON

Of the six films Chick Strand screened for her show at Millennium in February, the two films which incorporate the broadest range of her concerns and achievements are *Elasticity*, (1975) and *Mujer de Milfuegos/Woman of a Thousand Fires*, (1976). Both films reflect Strand's Romantic aesthetic: a keen sense of the individual inscribed in the world, as reflected in nature and the environment. In each film both personal and societal aspects of our culture are made accessible and meaningful through a deep feminine persona and through formal and ritualized constructions of image, word and sound.

The physical world as it resonates an emotional essence of the individual characterizes the opening sequences of both *Elasticity* and *Mujer de Milfuegos*. *Elasticity* opens with the sound of a reeded instrument, blowing softly, a black frame with the title, "Stones too can speak their secret names", followed by a close up of worn sandalled feet walking toward the camera, turning slightly and climbing eroded stone steps. As the camera pulls back, an old woman climbs a barren slope which is covered with scattered ruins. As she turns and looks at the camera, the close up of her face dissolves into a tighter close up of her hands holding a rock. As the stone shifts from one hand to the other, its facets refract beams of light which condense into an oval mirror. The flare of light from the mirror becomes the light beam of a film projector directed at the camera and us, the audience, who take the place of the screen's surface.

Mujer de Milfuegos' opening sequences, which parallel this construction, open with a black frame and the title, "the moon is dead . . . dead", the sound of a strong gusting wind and the image of tall, dried reeds bending in the heavy wind. The urgency and anxiety of this combination of wind and lifeless vegetation combine, briefly, with a woman's voice singing as if from a great distance. Soon, the tall grasses reveal the outline of a woman's long dark skirt and a close up of her feet moving toward the camera; the feet turn and the camera sees the back of a woman walking away into a deserted garden surrounded by the ruined walls of a building. The wind is punctuated by the slow whisper of a flute and the words, "my heart feels like a black hole in infinity". Again a close up of slowly moving feet and the swirling hem of an ample, dark skirt, followed by a long shot of a woman (seen from the back) climbing a wide stairway and receding from the camera.

The parallel elements of these two opening sequences are transformed and



Mujer de Milfuegos (1976), By Chick Strand

repeated in the concluding sequences of both films and underscore the strong, circuitous, ritualistic motifs which undergo metamorphosis throughout the films.

Although Strand is not a strict formalist, she is fascinated by multiplications of associative possibilities and combinations as well as many reflexive strategies which call attention to the film medium. There are numerous manipulations of the footage by step printing, (to slow down and stretch the footage and alter the speed backward or forward), reversals of color and/or motion, opticals, and intercutting of color with black and white, frequently used to foreground textures rather than color relationships. She may use photographic stills as a *mise en abyme* within a frame or as extracted elements of a single frame (by matting) to be superimposed over sequential footage running at sound speed. The context of her formal elements are seldom used for blatantly "structural" pretexts and expositions; instead these devices are used as metaphorical interjections expressing poetic and personal associations.

Strand has said that *Elasticity* "is autobiographical in the sense that its elements stand for things that have been important in my life". A shelf, resembling a votive centerpiece, contains a photograph frame, a rose to its left and a burning candle on the right. The sound of a heart beats slowly and rhythmically. With each beat a new photograph dissolves over the previous one; famous personalities, friends, a resemblance of Strand with fantastically exaggerated glass eyes and Artaud pointing upward. As the camera pans to follow his direction, a matted figure of a high diver is superimposed over a turbulent ocean. The rushing motion of wind and water accelerates as the diver bridges a new section of the film called the "White Night", which, according to Strand, represents those things in the past that have almost retreated from memory. This section and the succeeding one, ("Dream of Meditation"), contain a stunning combination of sound and image montage. The tactics of image/sound counterpoint through matching and mismatching, and complex rhythmic dynamics such as repetition, retardation, acceleration, and stasis combine the use of visual and aural constructions in one of the most evocative and masterful uses of these dual elements of cinema.

In *Elasticity*, the opening sequence is followed by a sequence using only stock footage with the implication that this is footage the viewer may have seen, which is already imprinted in her/his memory. This footage consists of quick cuts of a woman in a beauty parlor having her hair cut, CU of hair on floor, doctors scrubbing up for an operation, surgical instruments being sterilized, and being laid out in the operating room, a bride being carried over the threshold, a woman in a model kitchen opening the oven door while three model children watch admiringly. Over this sequence of images the sound track alternates between Judy Garland singing "Somewhere over the Rainbow" and two women arguing over the validity of an eight year old girl's opinion about what she has just seen. One woman says that she could not possibly have an opinion because she is just a child, while the other woman affirms the identity of the child and her right to have a chance to say what she thinks. When finally asked, the child answers "I don't know." The sound and image cuts to a man (with three smiling listeners) apathetically describing a suit he has owned since 1945 which has in its pockets the lint and crumbs of three marriages. It is a common joke among women that our opinions, (especially as female children), were not worth considering. But, a man, talking about anything at all has "presence". It is a brief, and effective collage-parody. We certainly have seen this footage before!

What Strand accomplishes in the sequence described above is a linking of the personal elements of the film with broader, societal concerns. This interplay between exploration of the self and the examination of how social forces, (sometimes as memories and parodies of other films and genres such as "the exotic Orient" and World War II newsreels), interact with and mold that self, continues throughout *Elasticity*.

In *Mujer de Milfuegos* the situation is different. Here the action takes place in the strange, inert environment of a ruined villa. The main character, and sole presence, is almost totally isolated from outside contact. We are not even sure that the hand caressing the woman's neck in lovemaking belongs to another person until we hear the birth cries of a newborn child; we must then assume

the presence of another person. Her action characterizes, in many ways, the roles in which women have been cast by social forces: compulsive domestic activities such as moving rocks (objects) around from one arbitrary place to another, sweeping a dusty floor where the dust settles right back, walking, waiting, and endless retracing of steps.

Strand ritualizes domesticity, and the imprisoned consciousness within that framework, without condescension or censure. It is here that Strand's anthropological background, which is more evident in her other films such as *Mosori Monoki* (1969) and *Cosas se mi Vida* (1975), adjusts to the fictive world of *Mujer de Milfuegos* and transforms the point of view she had previously adopted into the flow of a mythical encounter. "I like to get close to people with my 12-120 zoom lens and let them speak for themselves."

The two films, *Elasticity* and *Mujer de Milfuegos*, work as complementary opposites; one dealing with the problem of the individual in society by a constant shifting from Romantic imagery evocative of the personal self to situations portraying the impact of society on that self, the other, highlighting social and psychic conditioning of role models by portraying activities in seeming absence of external forces. The combination of anthropological and autobiographical elements, tempered by a highly personal approach, give Strand's films an importance in the avant garde.

(Chick Strand's SOFT FICTION (1979) is a 60-minute, black and white personal documentary that brilliantly portrays the survival power of female sensuality. Like earlier Strand films such as MOSORI MONIKA (19) and COSAS DE MI VIDA (19) that also celebrate human survival, it combines the ethnographic documentary with a sensuous lyrical expressiveness more frequently found in independent cinema. As in the Maysles' brothers GREY GARDENS and the best of Wiseman documentaries, Strand focuses her camera on people talking about their own experience, capturing subtle nuances in facial expressions and gestures that are rarely found in dramatic features. Yet she frankly acknowledges the presence of the camera and the effect it has on her subjects, for the power of artistic manipulation is part of the territory she is exploring.

The title SOFT FICTION works on several levels. It evokes the soft line between truth and fiction that characterizes Strand's own approach to documentary. The film presents five women relating a powerful personal experience directly to the camera. The range of topics includes an erotic fantasy about a bannister, a sexual adventure at a rodeo, incest with a grandfather, a deliberate trade-off of drug addiction for ~~being~~ romantic love, and a painful childhood memory of persecution by the Nazis. Although the content of these stories could mark these women as victims, the amazing thing is that they all emerge as strong survivors--partly because of the way they perceive, interpret and recreate the experience for the camera.) Presumably these stories are all true, and yet we really don't know for sure. The style of delivery, the tone of voice, the structure of the narrative raise questions in our minds about how the material has been reworked, revised or censored for an audience. In an interview following the screening at OASIS,¹ Chick Strand told me:

"It was an incredible experience to shoot and record these stories. For each of the women, it was an exorcism of the experience. They knew they'd be up there on the screen, that strangers would see it. There'd be no backing out."

Strand's artistic manipulation is apparent in the sequential arrangement of the stories (each tale alters our understanding of the previous episodes), the choice of visuals that accompany and shape the meaning of the ~~narrative~~ ^{monologue}; and the fictional journey that she uses as a narrative frame. In an early sequence, as the hand-held camera moves through a house searching for the first narrator, we briefly glimpse on a white wall the shadow of the filmmaker. We're always aware of Strand's presence as the totally absorbed listener, whose fascination with the material is based on her own personal experience--perhaps even on a similar story

which is also being exorcised in the filmmaking process but is never explicitly told. It's the back story or the shadow version of what's being narrated on screen, further softening the line between truth and fiction in Strand's special brand of personal documentary.

The title also evokes soft core fiction, which is appropriate to the film's erotic content and style. Not only are many of the stories highly sensuous, but also the sultry music on the sound track and the texture of the film's visual surface. It's rare to find an erotic film with a female perspective dominating both the narrative discourse and the visual and audio rhythms, but that's precisely what we find in *SOFT FICTION*. Like erotic foreplay, the opening sequence gets us in a receptive mood for the gestures and images to follow. As we hear the sound of a train, we see blurred images through a window. Strand immediately suggests that she intends to use ~~the~~ both the audio and visual tracks of the film medium as a vehicle for a female perspective: "Trains can be symbolically linked with men, but the idea of riding on a train is somehow linked to women--perhaps because on a train you see everything in between." The soft focus and the accelerated motion render the visual images abstract, yet the rhythm and patterning of horizontal lines have a sensual appeal that is relaxing. Gradually the audio track develops a comparable richness as the sound of the train is overlaid with a woman's voice singing a ritualistic chant. As both image and sound become more representational, the sensuality intensifies. We see a woman (Amy Halpren) seated by a window in a moving train. Although the abstract images are still visible through the window, we watch the light and shadow playing through the weave of her straw hat. The extreme close-up makes us very aware of the texture of the woman's skin, hair and mouth. Then we see her legs, from an odd low upward angle, as she pursues her journey on foot. As the image alternates between face and legs, we hear continuously on the sound track a voice-over of a woman from a TV Yoga exercise program describing physical moves designed to make us relax "with a feather soft touch...as if to say yes." The voice-over enables us to see that the woman's journey in the narrative is also an inner exploration of mental processes and body rhythms. The soothing voice choreographs our breathing: "And now you're breathing to become...deep within you... enjoy the stillness, breath in, breath out." Since we still hear the chanting, music, and sounds of the train behind the verbal incantation, the sound track becomes as dense and hypnotic as the visuals, both of which draw us into the film's sensual rhythms.

This sensual movement never stops, for it is carried forward by the train of audio and visual images that are subtly ~~xx~~ interwoven like the light playing through

the straw hat, and by the narrative thread of the woman's fictional journey that ~~draws together~~ the five ~~individual~~ individual monologues. Most of the sequences that develop the journey continue to enrich the interweaving of light and shadow, to contrast interiors and exteriors, and to underscore the themes of growth, control and survival. The next time we see Amy, the woman from the train, we peer at her through a window covered with lush foliage; leaving her outside, we follow the camera as it penetrates the deeper interiors of the house, searching for the first speaker. After the first monologue, we glimpse Amy as a dark silhouette against a bright window, watering plants in a ~~dark~~ darkened room, then watch her through the same window watering the garden outside. After the third speaker, we see the silhouette of a nude woman (Simone Gad) dancing to Sidney Bechet's lush rendition of ~~"Petite Fleur."~~ "Petite Fleur." The outline of her wild hair, sinuous arms, and swaying torso break the patterns of the light background, creating images that are simultaneously abstract and sensual.

Between the last two monologues, we witness survivors of three accidents or potentially fatal encounters. In the first scene, a three-legged dog carefully rearranges itself in a comfortable chair that stands in a room decorated with a rich clash of textured fabrics with intricate designs, as in a painting by Matisse. The visuals of the next scene offer a stark contrast. The white face and hands of a woman (Cathy Freeman) float against a black background, as if she were a ghost. As she sings Schubert's "Death and the Maiden," the lyrics are translated in white subtitles.

Go by me
Grim reaper
Don't deny me
the She dreams of my ~~goals~~ *youth*
Give me your hand
You have nothing to fear from me
I ~~come~~ come as a friend
Not as an avenger
Be of good heart
And sleep free in my arms
Far from danger

These lyrics comment on the stories told by the other women, obscuring the boundaries between this sequence and the other monologues. In the personal narratives the threatening male Other appears in many forms--as a cowboy, an incestuous grandfather, a killer/lover, and a Nazi--but in this more conventionalized symbolic version he is clearly identified as Death. The song makes us realize that the other episodes are merely individual variations on the inevitable encounter with destruction, ~~which~~ which we are all bound to experience. The third scene returns to Amy, carrying her straw hat and a suitcase, walking through a bower covered with grapevines.

When her suitcase accidentally opens and spills the contents on the path, she picks up a black cloth and waves it in the air, as if courageously signalling death or lyrically breaking the light.

After the final monologue, we return to the earlier images of Amy's face and legs, this time associated with waters of renewal. The visuals grow more abstract; then we see a naked woman riding on horseback, her body breaking the light and creating sensual patterns as in the earlier sequences of the dance and the straw hat. The close-ups reveal her smiling with pleasure and allow us to savor the textures of her skin and hair and of the horse's mane glistening in the sun. In the final shot we see the woman's hands firmly holding the reins, suggesting that Strand uses her artistic control to reaffirm the survival power of female sensuality. The screen goes black but we still hear the train, signalling that the journey continues, and we see the final title, reminding us that this film covers spatial and temporal moves in Chick's own life: "1976-79 HOLLYWOOD TUJUNGA."

The title *SOFT FICTION* also evokes softness as a female characteristic that can be interpreted both negatively and positively. In a pejorative sense, softness implies weakness and victimization, a quality that makes one easily altered by outside pressure. In the monologues, the outside pressure is usually exerted by males. Chick Strand intends to make a sequel to this film entitled *HARD FICTION*, in which men will tell similar stories. On the other hand, softness also implies flexibility and thereby functions as a positive mode of survival and creative transformation. This is precisely how Strand had used it in her earlier film called *ELASTICITY* (197), her most autobiographical film to date.

This positive sense of softness dominates the opening monologue by film critic Beverle Houston,² in which she describes a strong erotic urge to be transformed into an art piece with long slow curves.

"I had a warm feeling, a wave of desire went through my body to become this railing, to become this piece, to become those curves, that shape.... I could feel that in the small ~~my~~ parts of my self...like the warmth of desire that makes you feel your bones are going soft inside."

Strand claims that Beverle's erotic fantasy provided the germinal seed for the whole film.

"Beverle Houston and I were at an art opening. We walked down stairs and saw a nice bannister. Beverle started telling about that other piece she had seen ~~at~~ at the Pasadena Museum. I found out something about Bev I didn't know--that she was a sensuous person. I told other people that I was making a film, using this story, and they would tell me other stories. That's how the film grew."

The special generative function of this story is revealed, not only by its position as the opening monologue, but also by the way Chick chooses to shoot it. The camera moves down a staircase as if searching for a subject. It passes by Beverle, who is seated in the living room rather self-consciously in a formal black gown. As the camera moves on to the kitchen, Beverle begins her narrative ~~in~~ in a voice-over. As soon as she mentions the bannister, she captures the full attention of the camera, which cuts to an extreme close-up of her face. This sequence introduces the visual style that Chick will follow in most of the other monologues: huge talking heads that reveal the facial gestures of the speakers, with brief cutaways to close-ups of their hands. In the case of Beverle, the hand is strong, expressive, and well manicured. ~~She~~ She speaks in passionate, hushed tones, yet her pace is slow and halting, forcing the listener to hang on every word. Her pun on piece introduces the fusion of art and sex, which remain united through the rest of the film. Strand intends *SOFT FICTION* to be as sensual as the bannister with its spiral curves flowing outward; it aspires to be a piece that will make women identify with its soft core. After the camera leaves Beverle, her transformational mode lingers in a voice-over: "Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be a black cat...to move through the world in fur?" Her question introduces the film's recurring motif of the cat, which is traditionally associated with female sexuality, identifying it first as a soft sensuous texture.

The other four monologues play with the positive and negative meanings of softness as if they were light and shade. The women flirt with danger and victimization, yet take pride in their malleability and survival. Because of this tension, these stories are primarily responsible for the film's emotional impact. The second monologue--a comic tale of an erotic adventure at a rodeo--is read by Karen Amend, a pretty handwriting analyst. ~~No~~ matter how carefully we scrutinize her gestures--her ironic smiles, spontaneous laughter, and coquettish toying with her ~~hair~~ hair--we are not really sure whether this is her own story. The magnifying glass and critical skills she uses to analyse the handwriting may be devious props. Strand claims that the story is not Karen's and that she purposely used the third take of the reading to increase the ambiguity. The line between truth and fiction is further obscured by the devious personality of the author and by the inclusion in the story of another artistic cover--the art of photography. The woman goes to the rodeo with a camera, using it as a prop. When a cowboy asks her if she wants to take his picture in the nude, she answers "sure" because she assumes it's impossible. But he and two of his friends take her to a dormitory, where they force her to go down on all three. Her bravado prevents her from seeing that her sexual submission was inevitable from the start. While this sexual encounter could easily be interpreted as a gang bang, the presence of the camera and her own sense of humor provide the woman with some sense of control. She admits that she tried to use the camera as a

distraction so that she could get away, then covers her failure with a joke: "I never made it, but he did." After it's all over one of the cowboys offers to fuck her in return, but she's more concerned with ~~not getting out with~~ getting out with her camera unharmed: "I had escaped both injury and scandal. I felt ecstatically in control again...safe in a ~~public~~ public place." As if to prove that she's totally recovered her power and audacity, she approaches another cowboy who is even handsomer than the others and repeats the whole process, intentionally. This time they go to a horse stall. After he comes like the other three, he tells her this experience doesn't mean anything, "It will make a good story to tell your grandchildren"--or her friend Chick Strand! Again she feels safe because of the anonymity of this encounter--an anonymity she tries to retain in Chick's film. Her story's punch line is: "But photography is a power to be reckoned with." The cowboy's name is clearly visible on his belt buckle in the photograph; now she knows where he lives and is obsessed with calling him. Photography helps her get hooked on a zipless fuck! As Chick shows us Karen laughing at the end of the narrative, we can't help but think that the punch line totally dissolves the lines between truth and fiction, identification and disguise, by applying equally well to all three women who are artistically controlling this scene--subject/author, actress/analyst, camerawoman/editor. The story's humorous tone and its ironic development of the art/sex fusion also makes us see Beverle Houston's erotic fantasy from a new perspective--as another example of female sexual bragadocchia!

In the next monologue, a story of incest, the comic tone and coy disguise totally vanish. The film cuts to a static shot of a brightly lit kitchen--which resembles a set-up in Akerman's JEANNE DIELMAN. A young woman in the nude (Melissa Lou Beal) enters the room, pours herself a glass of juice, turns on an electric fan and a radio, and then starts to cook breakfast for herself. The radio serial GRAND CENTRAL STATION immediately dominates the sound track, developing the train image into a structural principle that controls the whole film. In this radio melodrama, all trains lead into the heart of the city, the juncture for the individual stories. This commentary makes us reinterpret SOFT FICTION as urban soap opera, of a highly self-reflexive variety. We are even told that the stories will include "those who have been intimidated by the heavy perfume of the theater." We also learn that this particular narrative "is a love story."

As soon as we see her crack open the eggs in a frying pan, we hear Melissa begin her narrative in a soft, husky, ^{Oregon} West Texas twang. It's a sexy voice with a tone of intimacy. Unlike the other monologues, Strand chooses to keep the audio and visual tracks separate. The whole story is told in voice-over. We gauge its authenticity by the sound of Melissa's voice. Despite the fact that she is the youngest and most vulnerable of the storytellers and the only one seen in the nude,

OREGON

we recognize her strength and survival powers in the sturdiness of her body, the sureness and independence of her physical movements, the ~~hard~~ hardness of her appetite, and her ability to see the incest from multiple perspectives.

The story begins with a lyrical sensuous description appropriate to romance. She tells of diving into green water like a fish, diving in and out. Then she runs to grandpa, who is waiting for her with a big towell and open arms. At first it sounds like a female version of the nostalgic memory from Fellini's 8½, where little Guido is ~~wrapped~~ lovingly wrapped in a towell by his mother, but this ~~incest~~ incest is consummated.

"I was young, only seven, but we would make move on the couch, a red courdoroy couch, we had a cat who would jump on the couch, a black cat with green eyes, and I trusted grandpa, and the fire would dance off the cat's eyes."

The amazing thing about this narrative is ~~that~~ Melissa's ability to see both her own victimization in the situation and also the sensuous richness of the experience. The incest doesn't defeat her because she has a strong feline resilience of body, perception, and spirit. She deals with her experience like a writer, carefully choosing her words, gradually developing an image with an artistic control that helps subdue the threatening content.

"I remember once I saw his penis...and it was so strange, like a snake, it had a head just like a snake, a velvet snake, a pink velvet snake." As we watch her in close-up, cutting her taast and chewing her food, we hear her justify her grandfather and assume part of the responsibility for the sexual encounter, as ~~the~~ the woman did in the rodeo story.

"He would make me feel good, he said he wanted to teach me how to make love...[cut to a close-up of the egg yolks being broken by a ^{SPOON} fork]...he taught me how to be sensual I guess, I guess that's what he wanted...It's almost as if I felt I wanted it to happen."

The visual choices confirm that he succeeded in teaching her to ~~develop~~ develop her own sensuality and to take responsibility for her own body. Her intelligence and honesty allow her to admit her own vulnerability and the fact that she learned other dev^{er}sious habits as well.

"Sometimes I didn't want to admit what happened. It was too close, and too strong, and it would scare me. Sometimes I wouldn't allow myself to be aware of what we were doing.... I would feign being asleep--all typical female tactics of avoidance and I learned them young...now I'm a master at them. I felt captured, really ^{CAPTURED} confused, because there was no way out."

Unlike the other storytellers, she is able to acknowledge both sides of softness-- the flexibility and the passivity. She is able to see the Protean power of disguise, not only as creative transformation like Beverle and Karen, but also as a defensive survival strategy in a no-exit trap. Although Melissa's episode ends with a fade to white, it is immediately followed by the ecstatic nude dancing of Simone Gad. The dancer may remind us of Saraghina, the embodiment of demonic female sexuality who dances ~~appears~~ at the end of Fellini's memory sequence, but in Strand's version the surviving sensuality is totally reaffirmed.

The next story is told by Johanna Demetrakas, a strong feminist filmmaker (director of documentaries on two communal art projects by Judy Chicago--WOMAN'S HOUSE and THE DINNER PARTY), who seriously rivals Strand in controlling the artistic manipulation within the sequence. Chick cuts directly to a tight close-up of Johanna's face and stays there throughout the entire sequence, except for brief cutaways to close-ups of her hand holding a cigarette, revealing her addictive personality. Occasionally the image shows only half of her face, highlighting the vitality of her hair and eyes or the sensuality of her mouth. The content of the story is pure masochism-- consecutive addictions to a man and to heroin. But the delivery totally transforms it into a story of incredible will power and mental strength. It's as if Johanna denies that her identity can be defined by what happens to her; like a character in a novel by Henry James, she insists on the power to create her reality ~~jumping~~ through the quality of her consciousness. She makes the story her own erotic art piece.

Chick Strand told me: *I told Johanna about my film and she told me she had a story too.*
~~"I had heard about Johanna's story and asked her about it.~~ After we talked, she decided to do it for her acting class. The night she did it, she called me up afterward all excited. Then she did it again for my film."

With the stylized language and delivery of ~~her~~ her opening lines, Johanna immediately establishes a female macho persona.

"When I lived in Paris, I was very promiscuous...sex in the afternoon, midnight rendezvous, reading Wittgenstein in the morning. When I moved to New York, I decided it was time to get hooked on a man. So I moved to New York and found myself a real killer. This guy was a real killer and I was really hooked."

Although she admits that "pain is total environment and I was hooked on total environment," she claims "I was not a masochist...so I decided to replace one total environment with another total environment to get rid of the pain." Johanna forces us to see each of the preceding narratives as another example of a total environment (the railing, the rodeo dormitory, the incestuous relationship) in which the narrator helped to create the nature of the reality; we also realize that the previous storytellers all seemed to be aware of this power.

At each point in her own story, Johanna takes full responsibility for what happens to her, even if she romanticizes the extent of her control.

"I decided to get hooked on something I could touch and see, so ~~that~~ that I could control it. Of course when you're really hooked, you're not in control but that's part of the romance."

Despite the stylization of her narrative, Johanna convinces us through the power of her face, ~~and~~ the sureness of her tone, the directness of her stare--that she really does have this strength of will. She doesn't lie to us or herself about the powers of drugs or romance. Instead, she offers a novel perspective that seems self-evident as soon as it's spoken.

"It's interesting about being hooked--there's always something good, or else you don't get hooked. Actually it was great fun, you meet a lot of interesting people on the streets... It was good, it was sensual, it had its own ambience, it's own world. I asked myself, why am I quitting, it's so good, so clear, so real, and so spacious?"

She admits the ~~bunk~~ truth; in her story the primary issue is self control. She quits simply because "that was the plan. I kicked, I never tried it again, and I exorcised him." Johanna acknowledges that her participation in this film (like that of the other storytellers) not only displays her own artistic and sexual bravado, but also exorcises a painful period of her life. Although her story focuses on sensual experience, Johanna emerges as an exorcist with considerable mental and spiritual power.

Chick Strand lets Johanna present this total affirmation of human will with full strength and clarity, yet she undercuts it somewhat by choosing what follows--the singing of "Death and the Maiden" and the final narrative about the Holocaust, both of which define the limits of personal survival by shifting the "total environment" from sex to death. Yet even in these confrontations with the forces of ~~Thanatos~~ Thanatos, we see that the individual is able to exert considerable control through the conventions and selectivity of art.

The final story is told by Hedy Sontag, a fine actress who ironically is the least stylized of all the narrators. Chick told me, "The best experience I had was with Hedy. It was so high and intense." Hedy begins defensively: "Okay, this is going to be a little bit difficult." Everything we see tells us that this is an understatement: she shakes her head, sips some wine, furrows her forehead in pain, pauses in mid sentence, contradicts herself. She gives us one hard fact: "I was born in Poland in 1941, which was right in the middle of the war, and I came to the United States in 1949." After defining the borders of her memory, she retreats, relying on (in Melissa's words) "the typical female tactics of avoidance."

"It's hard to talk about things like this, but...I'm embarrassed, no, yes, I'm embarrassed. I've had experiences I keep struggling with to this day, and one of these is opening up to being vulnerable."

~~We realize~~ We realize that in this sequence all of the survival strategies from the earlier narratives are being tested, not by a personal domestic tragedy, but by the Holocaust--the greatest challenge to physical and spiritual survival in recent history.

Gradually Hedy selects details from her painful memories--the disclosure by a ~~16-year~~ 16-year old boy that there were Jews being hidden next door ^{in her house} the need for her as a cute three-year old to flirt with the Nazi who came to investigate, her "job" of sitting on his lap ~~to~~ to distract his attention away from those who were hiding. As if to distract our attention, Chick cuts away to a shot of Hedy's hand playing with a cat, who is rubbing against her boot. The images of the cat and the boot materialize as associations, rather than as segments of a linear narrative. As the story becomes more continuous, the camera cuts back to Hedy's expressive face.

"I was awakened when I was 3½, I remember the noises--running, yelling, and screaming, and the next thing I know we were being rushed out of the house and taken for a very long walk. I insisted that we take my kittens with us (laughs). I had little kittens, they were born in my cradle, and my father put them in a bird cage."

It is this vivid detail of the kittens that she singles out and clings to like a piece of velvet--because it is associated with warmth and love and security although it resides among those memories of pain and terror. The survival powers of the cat--its sensuous warmth and resilience, introduced in the previous stories--are now reaffirmed, not only by Hedy's narrative, but also by Chick's choice of visuals. Despite all the previous verbal allusions, this is the first time we've seen a cat on screen. It's as if this feline image were a guidepost for Hedy, leading her to find other safe spots and to avoid the land mines in her memory.

"It was necessary for me to be brave and I liked that then, and I like that now that I was brave then. And I remember a hill with fire and explosions of all sorts. I remember how frightened everyone was and my father carrying the birdcage with the kittens. And I remember feeling proud that I didn't want to be carried. And I remember that hill and there was something very bad going on the other side, and then there's a blank,"

Like Karen,, Melissa and Johanna, she remembers her own acts of boldness and courage and assumes as much responsibility for what happened to her as possible. Like Johanna, this might lead her to romanticize the extent of her own conscious control. Like Melissa, it might lead her to avoid the most painful moments and details and to choose her words with deliberate caution. As in all the previous

sequences of ~~these~~ SOFT FICTION, Hedy's story reaffirms the tough ~~and~~ resilience of the human spirit--a theme that Chick Strand continues to celebrate in her brilliant, innovative personal documentaries.

NOTES

¹ L.A. Film OASIS is a collective of L.A. based filmmakers, which for the last four years has been presenting excellent weekly programs of independent films from all over the world. Its screenings are currently scheduled on Sunday evenings at L.A.I.C.A.

² The professions of most of the storytellers are not identified in the film. Since I know most of these women and since I think this information affects my interpretation of their ~~stories~~ narratives, I am noting it here. But this in no way implies that this information is essential in order to understand and appreciate the stories in SOFT FICTION.

GUACAMOLE, 10 min., color, 1976

"Poetic surrealism. Approach is experimental in the relationships of image and sound. A film about the loss of innocence and the search for the essence of the human spirit.

"As children we are innocent in the sense that we are not born with values, morals and ethics. As we develop we are taught by our culture that which is ideal, and in our society what is ideal is based on a humanistic philosophy. In order to survive psychologically, we learn to accept that it is impossible to maintain this ideal humanistic behavior in our own lives and thoughts." CS

From SERIOUS BUSINESS COMPANY catalog:

"A short cine-poem whose meter is in the tragic rather than the celebratory mode. It focuses on the life/death polarity of fiesta and bullfight, rendered in a deeply painterly texture, where slow-motion and blue tones give it a lyrical melancholia."

—Anthony Reveaux, ARTWEEK

GUACAMOLE would make interesting viewing for classes in Latin American studies as well as film as art.

SOFT FICTION, 57 min., black and white, 1979

"One evening a lady friend of mine told me a story of an experience...one day she went to the Norton Simon Art Museum...she went into one of the rooms and there was a three dimensional piece that looked like a bannister...a stair railing...it was made of metal...a strange feeling came over her...she began to feel what it was like to be that piece...cold...hard...smooth...and she became tht piece...she talked what it was like to become an inanimate object...I thought...what a wonderful thing...I must film her while she tells this story...so I did. This led to other things...when I told friends about this footage, some said... I have a story...I filmed them...and then there are my own visions...of women..." CS

From the program notes for Chick Strand's upcoming show at Oasis:

"The hour long, SOFT FICTION, is eagerly anticipated as it is a sequel in some ways to her diary film, ELASTICITY. Strand, whose long time interest has been ethno-documentaries, turns this approach to the women around her, investigating the painful and extraordinary experiences that make up their secret lives. Although some of the stories are enjoyable, many are disturbing."

FEVER DREAM, 6 min., black and white, 1979

"A dream I once had." CS

LOOSE ENDS, 25 min., black and white, 1979

"The secretary of my department had thousands of feet of old films... cartoons, newsreels, one reel comedies, and short subjects. I cut out the things I liked and made up a story...I also used found sounds on tapes, and old radio shows." CS

Wednesday,

Dear Carmen:

Here's what I got:

The Chick Strand program will consist of 5 films. They are:

SOFT FICTION (54 min.)

intermission

LOOSE ENDS (24 min.)

FEVER DREAM (7½ min.)

CARTOON LE MOUSSE (11 min.)

KRISTALLNACHT (7½ min.)

I believe all are dated 1979 with the possible exception of one or two that are dated 1978.

On the op side are the notes Chick sent me on SOFT FICTION, LOOSE ENDS, & FEVER DREAM. In addition there's this:

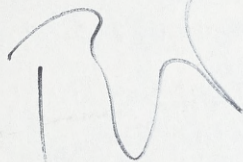
CARTOON LE MOUSSE: a continuation of found footage filmmaking

DRISTALLNACHT: dedicated to Anne Frank

You should be receiving a collection of stills in a day or two.

That's it.

Sincerely,



*P.S. Please return
these stills to
me when you're
finished with them.*

ANSELMO, 4 min color, sound. 1968

Music by La Banda Aguascalientes, with Anselmo Aguascalientes and Balsamo, the Magician. An experimental documentary, in the sense that it is an reenactment of a real experience. I asked a Mexican Indian friend what object he would like most in the world. His answer was, "A double E flat tuba". I thought it would be easy to find one at the Goodwill very cheap. This wasn't so, but some sympathetic musicians union members helped me to find a cheap, but beautiful brass wrap around tuba. I smuggled it into Mexico and gave to my friend in the desert outside Mexicali. The film is a poetic interpretation of this event filmed while it was happening in celebration of magic, tubas and the idea that you always get what you need...and sometimes even what you want...in fact you can have your cake and eat it too.

MOSORI MONIKA, 20 min. color, 1969

This is an ethnographic film about two cultures that have encountered one another. The Spanish Franciscan Missionaries went to Venezuela in 1945 to "civilize" the Warao Indians who live on the Orinoco River Delta. Before the missionaries came, the Waraos lived in relative isolation and were little affected by the outside world. The relationship between the Indians and the missionaries is simple on the surface, but it is manifested in a complex change of techniques and values which have indelibly altered the Warao vision of life.

The acculturation is presented from two viewpoints. A nun tells how the Indians lived when the missionaries arrived, what the order has done to improve conditions both spiritually and materially. An old Warao Indian woman tells what she feels has been the important experiences of her life. The two viewpoints are structured in counterpoint so that the deeper aspects of the juxtaposition of the modern culture over the old becomes apparent through the revelations of the two women.

"One of the best anthropology films I know. It successfully uses sound in a way in which Cogard talks about the seldom makes work. It expresses the ambiguous attitudes of the subjects with grace and good faith. The film makes the people's lives sad and poetic. Most of all it makes me sad for the passage of the old ways that had taken centuries to develop and which can be destroyed in a generation."

Ernest Callenback
Film Quarterly.

Any questions...just call or write.

Love,

Chick Strand
218 S. Harvard Blvd.
Los Angeles, Ca
90004
(213) 389-9356

GUACAMOLE, 10 min., color, 1976

"Poetic surrealism. Approach is experimental in the relationships of image and sound. A film about the loss of innocence and the search for the essence of the human spirit.

"As children we are innocent in the sense that we are not born with values, morals and ethics. As we develop we are taught by our culture that which is ideal, and in our society what is ideal is based on a humanistic philosophy. In order to survive psychologically, we learn to accept that it is impossible to maintain this ideal humanistic behavior in our own lives and thoughts." CS

From SERIOUS BUSINESS COMPANY catalog:

"A short cine-poem whose meter is in the tragic rather than the celebratory mode. It focuses on the life/death polarity of fiesta and bullfight, rendered in a deeply painterly texture, where slow-motion and blue tones give it a lyrical melancholia."

—Anthony Reveaux, ARTWEEK

GUACAMOLE would make interesting viewing for classes in Latin American studies as well as film as art.

SOFT FICTION, 57 min., black and white, 1979

"One evening a lady friend of mine told me a story of an experience...one day she went to the Norton Simon Art Museum...she went into one of the rooms and there was a three dimensional piece that looked like a bannister...a stair railing...it was made of metal...a strange feeling came over her...she began to feel what it was like to be that piece...cold...hard...smooth...and she became tht piece...she talked what it was like to become an inanimate object...I thought...what a wonderful thing...I must film her while she tells this story...so I did. This led to other things...when I told friends about this footage, some said... I have a story...I filmed them...and then there are my own visions...of women..." CS

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FEVER DREAM, 6 min., black and white, 1979

"A dream I once had." CS

LOOSE ENDS, 25 min., black and white, 1979

"The secretary of my department had thousands of feet of old films...cartoons, newsreels, one reel comedies, and short subjects. I cut out the things I liked and made up a story...I also used found sounds on tapes, and old radio shows." CS

(OVER)

CARTOON LE MOUSSE, 11 min., black and white, 1979

"A continuation of found footage filmmaking..." CS

~~P~~RISTALLENACHT, 7 min., black and white, 1979

"Dedicated to Anne Frank." CS

NOTE: All of the above films have optical sound tracks and are in 16mm format.



chick strand

notes on romance

When I was a little girl growing up in the thirties, I didn't like the movies. Something about them scared me. They were too real. So, I never saw a Shirley Temple movie until I grew up. All the kids went to the movies and they'd come back with marvelous descriptions, but I never went with them. Finally, as I began to understand the nature of films, I gave in and went to see *Stagecoach*. The thing about it that fascinated me was that the wheels on the coach went around backwards! From then on I knew that there was something fishy about the reality of the movies, but I never stopped going.

I loved Maria Montez in *The Cobra Woman*, and Donald O'Connor in those "kids make it to Broadway" movies. Later, during the early forties, the war years when all movies were softened up to keep up good morale, I liked *Lady in the Dark*, Lena Horne in *Stormy Weather*, and the technicolor films of Betty Grable. My favorite movies, though, were romances like *Love Letters*, in which Jennifer Jones is married to an awful guy who burns the love letters he sent her when he was overseas which were really written by his friend, a youngish Joseph Cotten. While the letters burn Jennifer tries to save them, but as her drunken husband fights her (he knows that she loves the letters and not him), he is stabbed to death by her aging aunt. Jennifer gets amnesia to forget the horror of the murder, and the only thing she remembers is that someone she loved wrote her beautiful love letters. Later, Joseph meets Jennifer and of course he has always loved her because of her answers to his letters, and she falls in love with him because he sounds like the letters he wrote to her. They marry but she thinks that he loves the woman he used to write to, not knowing that she is the

woman. She is willing to give him up to this "other" woman who he's always talking about, so that he'll be happy. However, she finds out about her past, and at last he is able to tell her the truth. The film fades out while they kiss, a remarkable future of happiness ever after before them. Now, *Voyager*, another favorite tearjerker, is about a prissy Bette Davis, dominated by an old fashioned mother or aunt. Bette somehow gets to go on an ocean voyage and someone has convinced her to be herself, so she dresses up, discards her glasses and knocks us out with her new found chic. She is so beautiful that she attracts a married man, Paul Henreid. His wife is either sick or crazy, but anyway hasn't been "a wife" to him in years. Paul also has a teenage daughter who has emotional problems, is sort of homely, and needs a mother. Bette and Paul have an affair, in which he is always lighting two cigarettes at a time and giving her one as a symbol of his love and their great romance. (I started smoking cigarettes right after seeing that film.) Finally they are parted because it is sinful. But, his love with Bette is so pure that she gets to shape up the daughter and make her beautiful and charming and the film ends with Bette telling Paul that although they can't be together, what they had was almost religious because they are now doing the right thing by sacrificing each other and besides his daughter will be a part of them forever since he conceived her and Bette moulded her. This is the complete love sacrifice and an alternative to happy ever after. A combination of the two in which the woman gets the man but must sacrifice her career and freedom is another alternative played usually by Barbara Stanwyck, Joan Crawford or Ida Lupino. These

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women are always liberated, free, powerful, shrewd, remarkably witty, chic, intelligent and educated. They are the fighters for full womanhood, the survivors who can take it or leave it or have it both ways, at least until they meet the right man and give it all up for the promise of happiness ever after.

So, what was fishy about the movies and what I understood then about the nature of films was that they weren't exactly true, wheels don't really go around backwards! What I didn't understand was how the values and morals shown in them were a prototype for me and other girls about human nature and what would be normal and expected from life as we became women. When I was a growing girl, I believed that romantic love was like the films, that it was inevitable in my life, that it was forever romantic, good and true. The film always ended with a total commitment of the two lovers finally united, or the sacrificial exit of one or the other for rarified, more "moralistic" causes or the giving up of a career and independence because a man's life "was more important" (There always was that little teaser though that the damn fool was unable to do it on his own). So, you could maybe have a career before the marriage or have one after the love was sacrificed. My hope as a young girl was always that some day the prince would come and stay forever. I always felt superior to men because they needed women and women were so good that they'd help a man. But, I thought the reward would be the ever after part which seemed to me to be so secret, so wonderful that they couldn't show it and couldn't express it so films never portrayed it. It was like a present for when you grew up, the adults didn't want to spoil it for the young ones by giving away the beautiful knowledge. I guess I was sort of stupid, trusting them after the Santa Claus and tooth fairy rip offs.

With this vision of the ultimate woman's role and reward, girls my age drifted into womanhood, expecting at seventeen to find John Garfield or Cary Grant in the soul of our high school sweetheart or a glamorous career before the ultimate marriage. We were even willing to settle for a sacrificial exit as long as it was romantic. But looking for the breathless and sacred romance led many of us (without the benefit of the pill in those days) to

accept an early marriage. We were too impatient, too unprepared for a career, so we married and bore children as a matter of course. As we picked up dirty socks and washed smelly diapers, we dreamed of the protective, tough but sensitive, always in awe of us, males like Gable, Bogart and Tyrone Power. After all, that's what we'd been led to expect. The old dreams of romance ever after began to fade. When we began to look at our own lives, the disappointment that there was no joy in these routine child marriages and in youthful child bearing, we realized that we'd never been prepared to recognize what really brought joy to ourselves, that we'd never been prepared to love anyone or believe in ourselves. However, we had hints that there were golden rings to catch in real life. Luckily for me I caught and examined these possibilities which were even more romantic than anything Hollywood could come up with. One of my favorite real people heroines was Amelia Earhart, flying through space and light, courageous and independent, highly skilled, a poet, an inventor, an adventurer, keenly determined to do as she wished and with a true heart.

We had traded the possibilities these real visions could hold for us away for a pseudo adulthood. We cheated ourselves out of the experiences needed for a mature and joyful life. We denied ourselves the real joy and pride of womanhood and motherhood that could coincide with the independence of our spirits. For those of us who accepted and stayed with our youthful mistakes, we gave up freedom for some sort of martyrdom, and never knew the difference and just plodded along. Some of us felt the pull and freed ourselves to be ready for what really happens after the last clinch on the screen, the secret that had been kept from us. The secret was that we are left with ourselves, and it's only ourselves who make the visions and fulfill them. It is the image of the elasticity, tenacity and majesty of the human spirit that is the true romance for me. I'm not interested in dealing with abstractions, mathematical probabilities and optical illusions. I'm disheartened and bored with art games and cynical hipness. I look always for the secret life, the inner self struggling without cultural patina toward the surrealistic truth.

Pacific Film Archive Presents

file
Chick Strand

SEEING IN BETWEEN CHICK STRAND

March 1 Mexican Visions

March 15 Speaking Of/From the Body *Chick Strand in Person*

April 12 In Search of Non-Sense

April 26 Celebrations of Spirit

"We are left with ourselves, and it's only ourselves who make the visions and fulfill them. It is the image of the elasticity, tenacity and majesty of the human spirit that is the true romance for me." —Chick Strand

Chick Strand is a major voice in lyrical, experimental filmmaking whose work spans 25 years and whose 18 films — with several more on the way — range from intimate, poetic documentaries to surreal dream visions to found-footage collage films.

Strand was raised in Berkeley by politically conservative but atheist parents and studied anthropology at U. C. Berkeley. Her baptism into experimental cinema came through her friendship with Bruce Baillie, with whom she co-founded Canyon Cinema in the early sixties. Canyon's eclectic screenings of underground films took place first on a sheet in Baillie's backyard in Canyon, California, then in an anarchist restaurant in Berkeley (where sometimes one set of customers would have to pay their bill so food could be bought for the next ones), a private girls' school (which subsequently closed its doors to Canyon because it didn't like the sound of 'underground'), the Coffee Gallery in San Francisco, Ernest Callenbach's backyard, Strand's house, and the College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland. The tri-weekly screenings were enlivened by wine, popcorn, pillows, chairs borrowed from a nearby mortuary, and Strand in costume, collecting \$1 donations or IOUs in a sewing basket at the door and then, with Baillie, raffling off door prizes (including Baillie's homebaked pies) in the intermission. The screenings subsequently led to the creation of a filmmaking workshop and, with Ernest Callenbach and others, the publication of *Canyon Cinemanews* which included Baillie's recipes as well as information about film festivals and articles on film. At the same time as devoting herself to Canyon, Strand was studying and working two jobs, one of which she quit after being told to take off her peace button and lengthen her skirt. It was Baillie who taught Strand how to use his Bolex, and her first film, *Eric and the Monsters*, was shown at a Canyon screening.

Strand was thirty-four, twice married, and a mother of two when she left Canyon and the Bay Area to study filmmaking at UCLA. It was there, as part of the fledgling Ethnographic Film Program, that she made her early films combining her interest in anthropology and her passion for experimental cinema. Several of her stylistic and thematic interests are already evident in these early works which include her personal collage poem *Waterfall*, her lyrical, optically manipulated *Anselmo*, and her first documentary portraits *Mosori Monika* and *Cosas de Mi Vida*.

A busy teaching schedule has resulted in a mode of working that often involves many summers of shooting followed by a summer of simultaneous editing and completion of several films. Strand's distinctive camera style often involves being very close to her moving subjects — about six feet on extreme telephoto with no depth of field. The editing

March 1 Mexican Visions

Comments by Chick Strand

Guacamole (1976, 10 minutes, Color)

Poetic surrealism. A film about the loss of innocence and the search for the essence of the human spirit. As children we are innocent... As we develop we are taught by our culture that which is ideal, and in our society what is ideal is based on a humanistic philosophy. In order to survive psychologically, we learn to accept that it is impossible to maintain this ideal humanistic behavior in our own lives and thoughts.

Mujer de Milfuegos (1976, 15 minutes, Color)

Not a personal portrait so much as an evocation of the consciousness of women in rural parts of such countries as Spain, Greece and Mexico; women who wear black from the age 15 and spend their entire lives giving birth, preparing food and tending to household and farm responsibilities. *Mujer de Milfuegos* depicts in poetic, almost abstract terms, their daily repetitive tasks as a form of obsessive ritual.

Anselmo (1967, 4 minutes, Color)

A symbolic reenactment of a real event. I asked a Mexican Indian friend what he would like most in the world. His answer was, "A double E flat tube." I thought it would be easy to find one at the Goodwill very cheap. This wasn't so, but a sympathetic man in a music store found a cheap but beautiful brass wrap-around tuba. I bought it, smuggled it into Mexico and gave it to my friend in the desert. The film is a poetic interpretation of this event in celebration of wishes and tubas.

Cosas de Mi Vida (1976, 25 minutes, Color)

Expressive documentary about Anselmo, a Mexican Indian who lives on the central plateau. It is a film about his struggle for survival. He was born in a remote Otomi-speaking Indian village. Orphaned at age seven in a small but modern town where his parents had gone, he was the sole support of himself and his baby sister who eventually starved and died in his arms. Totally uneducated in a formal way, he taught himself how to play a horn and when he became a man he started his own street band. The film was started in 1965 and finished in 1975. During the ten years, I saw the physical change in Anselmo's life in terms of things he could buy to make his family at first able to survive, and during the last years, to make them more comfortable. I felt a change in his spirit from a proud, individualistic and graceful man into one obsessed with possessions and role-playing in order to get ahead and stay on top, but one cannot help but admire his energy and determination to succeed... The big problem making the film was to get the right voice. I tried about twenty over a period of two years. None worked, so I returned to Mexico and taught Anselmo how to say his own words in English. This film is a tribute from one artist to another.

By the Lake (1986, 9.5 minutes, Color)

A sort of collage film, using images shot for other films that somehow never were finished. The sound comes from various sound gathering adventures. An Anglo woman's interpretation of magic realism.

Artificial Paradise (1986, 12.5 minutes, Color)

Aztec romance and the dream of love. The anthropologist's most human desire, the ultimate contact with the informant. The denial of intellectualism and the acceptance of the romantic heart, and a soul without innocence.

Cinematheque

P R E S S R E L E A S E

May 18, 1987

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW FILMS BY CHICK STRAND

FILMMAKER CHICK STRAND IN PERSON

San Francisco Cinematheque

San Francisco Art Institute Auditorium
800 Chestnut Street, San Francisco

Thursday, June 4th, 1987; 8:00 p.m.

The San Francisco Cinematheque is pleased to welcome back one of its founding filmmakers, Chick Strand, with a program of new films receiving their Bay Area premieres. The show takes place on Thursday, June 4th at the San Francisco Art Institute, 800 Chestnut Street in San Francisco and begins at 8:00 p.m.

Chick Strand, along with Bruce Baillie, is one of the founders of Canyon Cinematheque in 1961. It is only fitting that during the 25th anniversary celebration Chick should return to the Bay Area to premiere five new films, all completed in the last year. Strand is one of the major voices in personal filmmaking. She has produced a body of filmwork that blends an interest in ethnographic documentary with a highly refined sensuous, lyrical expressiveness. In Anselmo and the Women she returns to Mexico to again capture the life of an Indian friend first encountered in her film Anselmo (1968). Coming up for Air is a collage experiment utilizing a wide variety of disparate literary voicings. These and the other three films on the program, By the Lake, Fake Fruit, and Artificial Paradise, are all a part of Strand's continuing involvement with Mexican life, magic realism, and the techno-tribal movement.

Chick Strand helped found Canyon Cinematheque in 1961, was a major contributor to Canyon Cinemanews during the '60s, helped organize Canyon Cinema Coop, and was one of the most important forces in the Bay Area film community until her move to Southern California in the '70s. She currently teaches at Occidental College.

Admission is \$3.50 general, \$2.00 for students with I.D., seniors and the disabled. For further information call the Cinematheque at 558-8129.

DREAM REPORT

By Chick Strand

August 8th, 1977—I'm sitting in a reclining chair, lying back. I woke up about seven o'clock, came downstairs, started to read, fell asleep again in my chair, and I had several dreams or parts of a dream. Then the telephone rang and I woke up. After a short conversation, I recorded the dream on a cassette tape. I felt close to the dream and was very excited. The following is a transcript of the tape.

In this dream I'm in a front room furnished like my front room here, except the room is painted off-white and it's big and tall. To my right facing me is a large door that is made of glass and has wrought iron work which has been painted off-white. Through the iron work of this closed door, I can see a hall which is lit from a second story sky light and some stairs. It's sort of Spanish style and I remember that I liked it very much. On the other side of the door is a built-in book case complex and a fireplace which isn't too fancy, all painted off-white. On the mantle of the fireplace I have placed some vases that I have, one an emerald green and another large one I bought in Mexico which is brown and white and black striped. I've placed in one some anise, or maybe fennel, what we used to call Lady's Tobacco when we were kids. It grows wild in Northern California. In the other some spinach, or swiss chard, or maybe rhubarb because it's green but with a red tinge. I can *feel* a red tinge. I remember remembering in my dream that in the past I had put those vases there with that stuff in it, and thought that it looked pretty good. Some people came and talked, I don't know who they were. I remember feeling a little apologetic toward the house because the furniture was ratty, the stuffing coming out of the arms of the chairs, much like I do now. I guess I get that from my mother, always feeling apologetic for things I know don't fit into the ideas of tidiness that most Americans learn and expect. I remember letting these people know that we had just moved in and hadn't had time to do much to the house. While they were leaving, I came to a part of the room I had forgotten. The front door they left through was to the left. In that part of the room was some very heavy plain wooden furniture. I thought in the dream that it belonged to my grandmother, although I knew that it didn't. There was a big wooden chest that people would use in dining rooms to display dishes and store linen, and a Persian rug. I remember feeling secure in the knowledge that "oh yes, I was getting things together and it was going to be a really nice place."

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REPORT Strand

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Then I went to the kitchen, but immediately the whole thing changed. The living room completely dropped out of sight and the kitchen was an apartment on the second story, probably built in the forties. It's like the ROTC buildings actually. I have been in a lot of houses during the war that had this same kind of construction, and this was a tiny kitchen in an apartment complex out in the country. I remember sensing oak trees and some brown, tall grass like we have here all over the hills. It was Hollywood, but it was on the outskirts, as if Hollywood were on the far end of town. There were other parts of the dream in this place. There was something to do with a car-port and some talk, but I don't remember that at all. I went out of the kitchen to the back stairs, which led to a tiny yard that was faced by some underground garages. It was dark and not a playground—just little bits of patches of ground for each apartment. A kid was out there playing around and having a confrontation with its mother. Immediately the kid disappeared when the mother saw me, and we started talking. The mother was dressed very strangely. She had on heavy rouge and lipstick that was smeared way up over her lip—one good smear off to her cheek. She had very dark hair with very fine texture, very much like my mother's, and a pompadour, like they wore in the forties; her hair was tied back at the nape of her neck. She had on a rather gaudy costume, almost like a gypsy, but she didn't strike me as being a gypsy. Immediately after we started talking, all the other women in the building came out and started talking as if they were excited about my being there and had been waiting for me to appear so they could check me out. They too were all dressed very strange, sort of out of the past. I didn't think they were old fashioned in the dream, but thought, "Oh! this is Hollywood, these are Hollywood women."

Then I was on the bank of a river nearby—I could still feel the presence of that other place with clarity. For some reason we had to get across the river, so we rented a canoe, but had to paddle lying down. Pretty soon it was just me paddling, and I was paddling it like a row boat. It was easy to do. I could feel the oars going into the river, and the texture of the water. We were going so fast that I could hear it going "Whoooo" through the wind and the water, and hear the water lapping at the boat. It was very calming, my muscles didn't feel tired at all from paddling, except for some reason I wasn't supposed to get up and look. Finally I did raise myself up. I was drifting in and out of a dream and felt like I always do when I'm lying back in this reclining chair, which I was actually lying in. I pushed myself up and was on a lake that was turquoise blue and very, very clear. A lot of people were swimming. They all had bathing caps on. I had almost got to the part where they rope it off for little kids so they don't get into too deep water. Someone said, "You're getting to the kids' part. You've got to park that canoe on the other side of the rock, on the other side of the island." I started backing off the ropes and immediately the boat started swamping. I had gotten into deep water and I thought, "Oh! I'm going to drown," and then I thought, "Oh no I'm not, I know how to swim, and I know what to do in a case like this," so I did it, and I didn't drown. But the boat just went out from under me and I reached down in order to save the boat. I pulled it out—it was a very little denim canoe. In the front and in the back it had two holes each, for legs to go through so that you and your partner in the canoe were back to back with your legs out these holes. I seemed to sense that you paddled it with paddles. I swam with the denim canoe, then I looked up and saw what they meant when they said "the island." The island was a big rock about half the size of Johnson Hall, only two stories up instead of three. Kids were diving from the rock and having a good time. I realized had the canoe survived, I would have had to go to the other side of the island to put it there.

Film Adaptations of Dream Images in *Mujer de Milfuegos* (Woman of a Thousand Fires)



I am dreaming that I am in a garden and several long, slender black snakes are kissing my hands. I am dreaming again that I can fly and float in the air with perfect control. I am soaring close to the earth very fast. (Painting by Neon Park)



I am dreaming that there are permanent wires and curls d



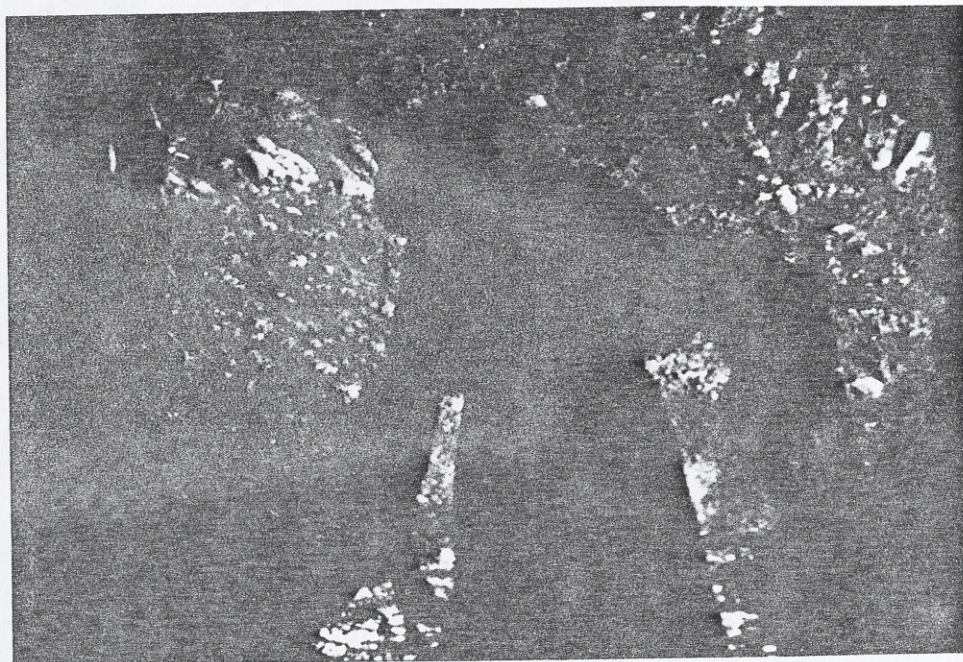
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DREAMWORKS



I am dreaming that I am in an underground tunnel. It opens into a huge empty theater. In place of seats, there are permanent wave machines from the 1930's, the kind that are heated by electricity with lots of wires and curlers dangling down. Everything is very dusty.

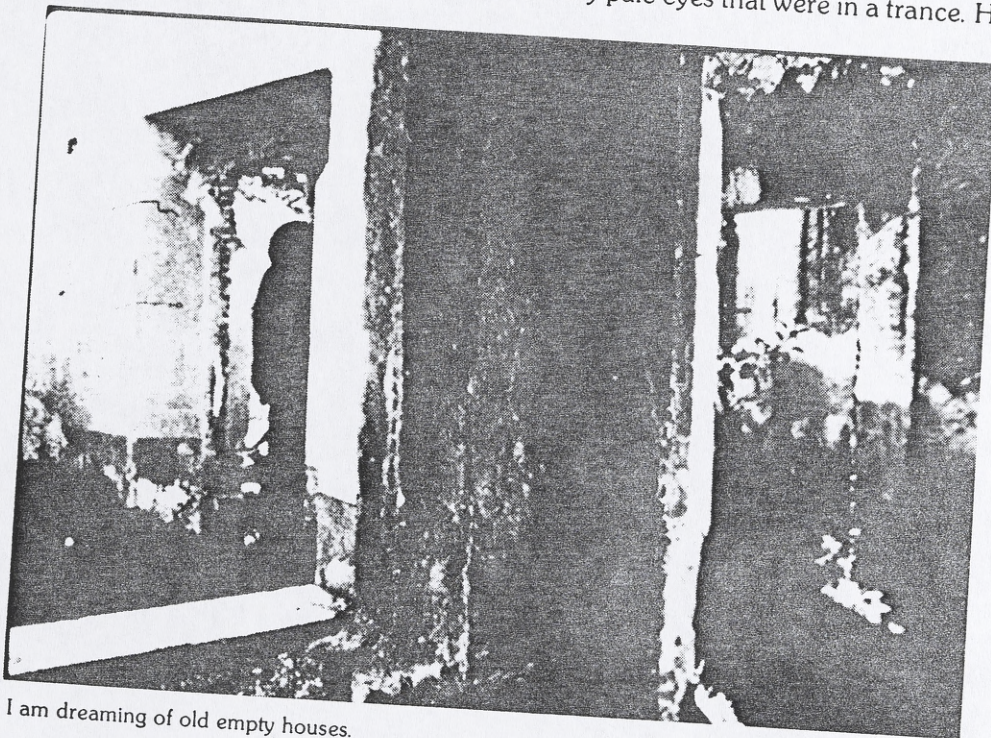


I am dreaming that I am carrying big stones around in a circle. These stones are burdens I have made for myself.

CHICK STRAND

Then the dream changed again. I lifted myself out of the water and was on a sidewalk curb where many people were swimming while others watched, lying down, walking, or standing. It was a very small town which on weekends would clear the main street and fill it with water, making a pool for their townspeople's recreation. It was still the same clear water and quite deep, twelve feet or so from the curb down. I could see down there the oil from cars on the parking spots. I remember thinking how hard they had to work on Fridays to get this street really clean to have a pool for their people on Saturdays and Sundays. I thought how marvelous it was.

Then the dream changed again, but was connected to these weekend festivities in that I felt a real sense of community, quite strangely. I was in a large hall, going to a rock concert. I was walking down an aisle that had linoleum just like my kitchen: real bright green with white flecks. It was strange walking on it, it felt very metallic. I got to my seat and my feet were cold, and I guess they were, lying back in my chair. I remember leaning down and putting on a big brown wool sock with white stripes. The people to my right watched me do this without commenting, but it seemed weird to them. While putting on my sock, I looked closely at the floor and saw lots of little things coming out of it that looked just like the caps on a tape recorder. Not the recording heads, but the things that spin around and that you thread the tape around to make it slide easily. The person sitting next to me said, "Oh that's the light show and those will light up during the performance." As soon as the show began, the people across the aisle were replaced by the stage, which was flush with the aisle so that the performers could walk directly from the stage to the aisle. When the first band came out, I remember thinking that I had to applaud and encourage them because the first act is always the dumb band; people even boo them because they are anxious for the band they paid for to come out. The first person pranced out of a void onto the stage, then onto the aisle. He was a tall and lanky guitarist with straw colored hair and very pale eyes that were in a trance. He



I am dreaming of old empty houses.

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DREAMWORKS

had a long guitar and a pastel colored velvet suit that wasn't bizarre or glittery. It was sort of subdued and had a long coat. He came out strutting and prancing, got to the aisle, and then fell down. I remember thinking, "Oh that poor guy! Here he is trying to be successful and do a thing and he fell, right away." As he fell to the floor in a stiff position, I could see he was still in a trance and his eyes were pale blue and golden. I wanted him to get up very badly and thought I saw him begin to raise himself up on his elbow, but he just froze in that position. Then my eyes were drawn to the right; prancing out in very much the same way was a guy who was very swarthy, with a dark mustache and short, dark hair. He was about four feet tall, and had on nothing but a silver lamé cape and a turban. I could see his pubic area and there was no hair there, sort of like a girl. There was nothing there, sort of like a doll. But he was a human being, not deformed in any way, maybe his legs were a little short. He just came prancing out with other people, but my eyes were on him. He mimed the words and pantomimed gestures to a song that was on a tape. It was exaggerated because the song was an instrumental, but he was mouthing words and flapping his arms around. Then immediately to the left of him in front of me, was a girl that came out about the same size. She looked very much like Liv Ullman, again with pale blue eyes and straw colored hair. I've never seen *Immigrants*, but she was dressed in a long black dress that was pinched in at the waist, only not to make her waist small. It had long sleeves down to her wrists and a high neck with a tiny white collar. She was doing exactly the same thing. Then immediately my eyes were drawn to the left of her and there was someone else, but I didn't even catch that because immediately my eyes were drawn downward about eighteen inches above the floor. There were some little creatures there that were very human, who were getting ready to turn around and prance onto the aisle. They were practicing, jumping up and down and shaking their legs. My first thought was, "These are human beings only eighteen inches tall," and then I thought, "Oh no, that isn't possible. There isn't such a thing," and then I looked closer and they had human faces all right but under the costume they had animal legs and looked like rabbits. I thought, "No, those aren't rabbits because they don't have ears. Where did they hide the ears?" I couldn't tell whether the human faces were really wonderfully made masks or not. It was the legs that gave it away. My conclusion was that they were cats. Cats to me have very similar legs to rabbits, and they were sort of jumping up and down back there out of the light. Then the phone rang, and it was Bill Moritz who woke me up.

CHICK STRAND